Connecticut Historical Society
BULLETIN

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# HARTFORD IN 1830:
# SOME THINGS THAT I REMEMBER ABOUT HARTFORD SIXTY YEARS AGO

By John Woodhull Stedman[1]

*A Paper read before the Society November 11, 1890.*

Sixty years ago the present boundaries of the City of Hartford contained something less than 8,000 people, who resided for the most part within the limits of Main Street on the West, Bridge Street (now Morgan) on the North, School Street (now Arch) on the South, and Commerce Street on the East.

[1] John Woodhull Stedman, was admitted to membership October 6, 1875, and died February 10, 1896 aged 76. He learned the trade of a printer with Philemon Canfield and with Case, Tiffany & Co. When 24 years of age he went to Norwich, where he continued in the printing and publishing business until 1870. He held the important offices of Bank Commissioner and of Insurance Commissioner, and in 1880, after his return to Hartford, was Secretary-Treasurer of the State Savings Bank. He was President of the Society from 1890-1894.

The territory outside of these limits was sparsely settled and mostly covered with pasturing and farm lands and family gardens. In fact the agricultural interests of the town were so prominent that one of our representatives in the Legislature repeatedly announced on the floor of the House that he represented Hartford's dungfork interests.

I suppose that 99 out of every 100 of the inhabitants were New England born and bred. Two or three families of Irish, as many refugees from the French West Indies, a few skilled English and Scotch millwrights and printers, and several German tailors, comprised, so far as I know and believe, the entire foreign element of the city. Negroes were numerous, and were wholly the remnants of the old slave population and their descendants. It was not uncommon, at that time, to meet with old people of this class who could relate the manner of their being torn from their homes in Africa in childhood, and their experience on the dreadful middle passage. It is a singular fact, that while they seemed a tough, prolific and hardy race, the old Connecticut negro families have now almost wholly disappeared, and their places have been filled and more than filled, by recruits from the Southern States.

At that time there had been none of those great disturbing agencies in social and business life, now so familiar to us, and it is presumed that there was little in the common life and pursuits of the people that had been changed from colonial days.

A daily newspaper was unknown, and the weekly papers gave only the merest skimmings of the local news. And why should there be a demand for local news in print? It was the custom at that time for the head of every family to take his market basket upon his arm at a very early morning hour and visit the central market, and the stores, and in the season the fish boats at the foot of Ferry Street, and procure the daily supplies for his table. In this way all the people were thrown together, and each one swapped his stock of local news with his neighbor, and each one carried to his family at the breakfast table a full assortment of all that might be stirring. This daily mingling of the people, all waiting upon themselves, carrying their own burdens, and freely conversing together, had its necessary leveling influence. Then would be seen, during the fishing season, the clergymen, doctors, judges, lawyers, merchants, mechanics, and common laborers of the city, marching together up from the ferry place, each with a shad dangling from his middle finger, or a string of pan fish in his hand, all chatting and joking together like members of one household. Wagons for the delivery of goods were unknown. If a man wanted any family supplies he went and got them, even if it required heavy jugs and baskets to carry them home in. As an example of this I will mention two neighbors whom I have seen going to their homes together, each with a well filled basket of provisions upon one arm and a new broom in the other hand shouldered in military style. One was Chief Justice Williams[2] and the other was Rev. Dr. Hawes.[3] Gover-

[2] Thomas Scott Williams, born in Wethersfield June 26, 1777; Yale 1794. He was Mayor of Hartford 1831-1835 and Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court 1834-1837. He married (1) Delia Ellsworth, daughter of Oliver Ellsworth of Windsor and (2) Martha M. Coit. He died December 22, 1861.

[3] Rev. Joel Hawes, born in Medway, Mass. December 22, 1789; Brown University 1809. He was Pastor of the First Church, Hartford, 1818-1865 and Pastor Emeritus 1864-1867. He married Louisa Fisher of Wrentham, Mass., and he died June 5, 1867.

nor Ellsworth[4] might have parted from them on State Street and gone to his home in another direction similarly laden. Have not customs changed in sixty years indeed!

There is little to be said about our ordinary city market supplies at that time, except that the meats were, of course, wholly supplied by the neighboring farmers, and the only fresh fish attainable were from the Connecticut River, except in cold weather. In the winter season, when the sleighing was good, loads of frozen venison—the animals standing on their feet as in life, packed together in large sleighs from New Hampshire and Vermont—were brought down in such abundance that venison was at times as plenty and as cheap as any other meat. And it was during the winter season only that fresh codfish and other fish from the Massachusetts coast could be obtained. They were brought here in a frozen state by special dealers, or as return loads by the teams engaged in carrying stone ware from our potteries to Boston and Salem, as I shall mention further on. In the fall of the year tens of thousands of wild pigeons were brought to market by our neighboring farmers and sold for from three shillings to four and sixpence a dozen. They formed a staple article of food for all classes during the harvest season. They were caught in nets, and so plenty were they at times the air seemed literally filled with them. Who can account for their disappearance?

Compared with the present time people then lived in a very plain and economical manner. Carpets were almost unknown, except sparingly upon the floors of the rich. The most that the best class of mechanics and tradesmen aspired to in this respect was an occasional rug or carpet made by domestic weavers from the carefully hoarded stock of woolen rags. There were few cooking stoves, and all the pianos in town might have been counted on one's fingers, and of such a primitive construction that now they would be considered useless. There was very little household furniture except of the plainest and most substantial description.

The industries of the people in the city proper were almost wholly connected with trade and commerce. There were few manufacturing establishments, and these were carried on in quite a primitive manner. I do not think there was a steam engine in town. The Hanks Bros.[5] on Commerce Street, in the old stone building still standing, carried on a general iron foundry business. They also manufactured cast iron plows of the Jethro Wood pattern, the first successful iron plow made in the United States, if not in the world, and all their machinery, including the blast of their melting furnace, was run by horse power. On the opposite side of the street Daniel Copeland[6]

[4] William Wolcott Ellsworth, born in Windsor November 10, 1791; Yale 1810. He was a brother-in-law of Chief Justice Williams and his partner in a law firm. His wife was Emily, eldest daughter of Noah Webster. He was a professor at Washington, now Trinity College 1827-1868, and Governor of the State 1838-1842. He died January 15, 1868.

[5] Alpheus and Truman Hanks, members of a family noted for mechanical talent, bought in 1820 the foundry of Goodwin, Dodd & Gilbert on Commerce Street. They afterward added the machine shop across the way that had been started by Daniel P. Copeland. Here it is claimed were made the first iron plow castings in the country and here was set up the first steam engine in the city. They continued in business until 1853 when they were succeeded by the Woodruff Iron Works.

[6] Daniel Copeland, born in Bridgewater, Mass. in 1766, lived in Hartford sometime between 1815 and 1850. He was a carpenter by trade and died in Huntington, Mass. in 1850.

carried on a large machine and millwright business by the same power. Gurdon Fox,[7] on Central Row, ground coffee and spices and furnished Philemon Canfield with power for his new Brattleboro power printing presses—the first power presses used in Connecticut—in the same way. In the rear of what is now 343 Main Street William Denslow[8] made wool cards by dog power—large stupid dogs being used on light machines, in place of horses. The Denslows also carried on wood turning and carving on the corner of Main and Sheldon streets by horse power. There was a large ale brewery in the old stone building still standing on Front Street, near the corner of Talcott, and adjoining this a rum distillery. The Boardman Bros.[9] manufactured block tin and pewter ware for table use near the corner of Main and Burr streets. This was the nucleus and starting point of the vast silver and brittania ware business of the state today. Ward & Bartholomew,[10] near the Little Bridge, on Main Street, carried on a large business in making bells and copper ware for cooking utensils and for distilling and sugar making in the West Indies. Glass ware was made a short distance above the North end of Front Street, and here, blowing glass bottles, was the first man I ever saw with a full beard. When he appeared upon the street he attracted as much attention as an Indian chief would have done in war paint and feathers. John I. Wells,[11] a venerable Quaker, on a street named after him, and which never should have been changed to Lewis, manufactured the best hand printing press then made in the world. Its excellence consisted in its solid cast iron frame and plain lever, instead of a wood frame and screw as formerly used, and nearly doubled the speed of hand printing. The lever, I heard it said, was adapted to printing from a press which he had formerly used in extracting linseed oil. Melvin Copeland,[12] near the foot of State Street, and Leonard Kennedy, on Burr Street, made carpenter's planes and a few other

[7] Gurdon Fox should not be confused with Gershon Fox, founder of G. Fox & Co.

[8] Elihu Denslow, born October 3, 1776 in Windsor; married (1) Abigail Bailey and (2) Mrs. Rhoda (Kilbourne) Andrus. He was a hatter and turner by trade and for a number of years kept the Connecticut Hotel. He died March 20, 1855.

William Judd Denslow, born May 14, 1806 in Bolton; married Maria Sloan of Hartford. From 1839 to 1846 he was proprietor of the Connecticut Hotel, which had been established by his father, and in 1846 entered into partnership with James M. Stedman to form the firm of Denslow & Stedman, iron and brass founders. He was also engaged in ivory and wood turning. He died September 29, 1864.

[9] Thomas Danforth Boardman, born in Litchfield January 21, 1784; died September 10, 1873, and his brother Sherman Boardman, born Litchfield July 10, 1787; died March 20, 1861. About 1804 Thomas Danforth Boardman commenced the manufacture of pewter in Hartford that continued on Main Street for nearly fifty years. The Boardmans are included among the foremost American pewterers.

[10] Roswell Bartholomew, born Harwinton January 28, 1781; a prominent business man in Hartford, being an extensive dealer in jewelry, hardware, iron and copper and real estate. He was for many years in partnership with Col. James Ward, under the firm name of Ward & Bartholomew, later becoming Ward, Bartholomew & Brainard. He married Sally Johnson Stone and died in Hartford April 7, 1830.

Col. James Ward, born February 2, 1768; married Ruth Butler of Hartford. He was commissioned in the War of 1812, was an active member of the Society, a founder of the "Retreat for the Insane" and Chief Engineer of the Hartford Fire Department. He died October 25, 1856.

[11] John I. Wells, died April 14, 1832, aged 63 years. He was an ingenious mechanic, being the inventor of a printing press which bore his name.

[12] Melvin Copeland, son of Daniel, was born in Sturbridge, Mass. in 1791. He married Lucinda Blake of Hartford and lived here until 1842. He was a plane maker and manufacturer of joiner's tools. He died in Huntington, Mass. in 1866.

joiners tools. Joseph Sheldon, near Kennedy's, had a rope walk, where all kinds of cordage were made, and the Churches, on Bridge Street, carried on the same business, and I believe still carry it on in the same place. Deming,[13] on Commerce Street, bored out logs for pumps, which were then in common use, and also made blocks for nautical use. There was ship building on Dutch Point—the last large ship built there, that I remember, was the "Sylvie de Grasse"—a 600 ton ship, for many years a regular packet between New York and Havre. There was also on Dutch Point a calico dyeing establishment, carried on by the father of Col. Colt.[14] On Exchange corner Elias Snow[15] manufactured shell combs.

On Front Street, corner of Grove, Daniel Goodale[16] had his pottery and kilns for the manufacture of stone ware, and on the same street, where the pottery business is still located, Goodwin & Webster[17] carried on an extensive business of that kind, supplying in large part the home demand, and making heavy shipments to places along the New England coast. They also kept up large warehouses in Boston and Salem, and in the winter season, when their fragile product could safest be moved in sleighs, lines of teams were kept up in the service of filling them, bringing, on their homeward trips, the fresh cod and other sea fish with which our winter's market was supplied.

It was about this time that the book and map publishing business of Hartford assumed great importance—especially the publication of school books. Silas Andrus,[18] a nervous, restless, untiring man, with a succession of partners, published a large variety of really valuable standard works, on cheap paper, with flashy bindings, which were mostly sold by roving auctioneers. I doubt if there was a larger office than his at this time in the United States. Oliver D. Cooke,[19] Ezra Strong[20] and several others, were also publishers of popular miscellaneous books. About this time the stereotype plates of the *Penny Magazine* of London edited by Lord Brougham and his associates, were sent to Hartford, after the European edition was printed, and the American edition was printed by Mr. Canfield[21] for many years.

[13] William Strong Deming, born August 18, 1784 in Wethersfield; married Esther Morgan of Hartford. He died March 7, 1855, leaving a son William Strong Deming (1826-1899) a furniture dealer in Hartford, who later removed to Malden, Mass.

[14] Christopher Colt, a manufacturer of cotton and woolen fabrics, was born August 31, 1780 and died April 5, 1850.

[15] In 1828 Directory, Elias Snow is listed as "lumber merchant." The next Directory, 1838, lists an Elias Snow as "laborer" and John Snow as a "comb maker."

[16] Daniel Goodale, grocer and stone ware merchant, made pottery between 1818 and 1830. His mark was an impressed "D Goodale
Hartford."

[17] Goodwin & Webster were in business from 1810 to 1850. Horace Goodwin, born February 12, 1781, died October 3, 1850, was senior partner with Henry Webster.

[18] Silas Andrus was born September 17, 1788. He was a book binder and, with various partners, was a publisher. He died February 15, 1861.

[19] Oliver Dudley Cooke died April 24, 1833, aged 67. He was a bookseller, printer and publisher in Hartford as early as 1802.

[20] Ezra Baldwin Strong was born July 3, 1805 and died October 23, 1846. He was at 1 Central Row and 193 Main St. for a few years.

[21] Philemon Canfield was born July 31, 1788. He was a printer in Hartford, certainly as early as 1822 when he printed the *Christian Secretary*. After 1835 he became associated with Gurdon Robins, Jr., as publisher and bookseller. He died September 17, 1864.

But the publication of school books about the year 1830, placed Hartford in the lead of all other places in the country in this department of trade, which it held for many years. The introduction of power printing presses by Philemon Canfield was just in time to supply the demand that sprang up all over the country for the school books on philosophy, botany and chemistry, by Dr. John L. Comstock,[22] and the geographies of Olney[23] and Woodbridge.[24] Published by David F. Robinson[25] and others they had an enormous sale, and made all connected with them, except the printers, wealthy and distinguished. In fact, the history of printing in Hartford, up to the year 1850, is yet to be written, and if properly prepared would give our city a prominence in this respect second to no other place in the country. I have reason to believe that the letter press of Barlow's *Columbiad,* published in 1807,[26] and at that time the most elegant book ever printed in this country, was executed in this city. The type was made expressly for it, of a size between what is technically known among printers as english and great primer—a size never made before. It was called Columbian, from the book which it was made for, and has never been made since. This font of type was in common use in the printing office of Philemon Canfield, as late as 1833, and what I say of its use I heard from the old printers in the office at that time. The engravings of the book were made in London, the book was bound in Philadelphia, and bore the imprint of Fry & Kammerer of that city.

An industry of Hartford sixty years ago not to be omitted in this connection, was that of rectifying cider, or as the expression was—racking cider. It was all shipped to distant markets. None of it was consumed here, for every family was supplied with plain cider directly from the farmers. A barrel for each grown member of the family was the rule ordinarily observed. Goodwin & Webster, on Front Street, and Horace Seymour,[27] near the South Green, were largely engaged in this business, and there were many others in the business in different parts of the city. The long strings of country teams drawing the cider to market were a marked feature in the streets of Hartford in the fall of the year at that time. The cider was drawn directly from the barrels in the carts into hogsheads and vats, and a large force of skilled men were employed in preparing it for use, by filtering and otherwise rectifying

[22] Dr. John Lee Comstock, born in 1789, author of *History of the precious metals; Treatise on mathematical and physical Geography* and *Observations on the causes of defective vision,* etc., was a surgeon in the War of 1812. It is claimed that his combined works had a total sale of nearly one million copies. He died in 1858.

[23] Jesse Olney, born October 12, 1798 and died July 31, 1872, was the author of many text books. His *Geography* and *Atlas* went through 95 editions and his *History of the United States* went through 43 editions. He was principal of the Stone School in Hartford from 1821 to 1833.

[24] William Channing Woodbridge was born December 18, 1794 and graduated from Yale College in 1811. He was for a time a teacher in the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, and died November 9, 1845.

[25] David Franklin Robinson, born January 7, 1801, publisher and bookseller, was president of the Hartford Bank from 1839 to 1853. He published, among others, the *History of the United States* by S. G. Goodrich and the *Cottage Bible.* He died January 26, 1862.

[26] Barlow, Joel (March 24, 1754-December 24, 1812)
*Columbiad: A Poem.* Printed by Fry and Kammerer. Philadelphia: 1807. 29½ cm. 454 pp.

[27] Horace Seymour, born December 21, 1791 and died April 3, 1868, was a dealer in groceries, cider and vinegar.

and refining it. Eligible cellars for the prosecution of this business were in great demand, and even the basement of the South Congregational Church was made to yield a handsome revenue to the Society from this source. I believe the ruin of this business was due to the temperance reformers and lager beer.

I have not included here everything that was manufactured in Hartford in 1830, but I am confident but few industries have been omitted.

The market for the surplus of the goods manufactured, except the books, was almost wholly in the valley of Connecticut.

Hartford was then the market town for the whole Connecticut River valley, from its mouth to its source, and for a large portion of the Central, Eastern and Western parts of the state, and the trade that centered here gave the town its industry and its wealth. To the North the trade was carried on in scows, which floated down with their lumber and farm produce, and found their way back by sails and setting poles. They also frequently brought down stalwart New Hampshire and Vermont and Massachusetts boys who were destined to make their mark in the business and social circles of our city. Lumber was floated down in great rafts that were a striking feature of river life during its navigable seasons, and was a source of great wealth to those engaged in it, and the commerce of the city, coastwise and foreign, gave animation to the business of the wharves and warehouses and stores near the river. There were regular lines of large vessels between Hartford and the West Indies. Their outward cargoes of horses and mules made Hartford one of the principal markets in the country for these animals. It was a common sight to see them corralled on our wharves by the hundred awaiting shipment. Their return cargoes were molasses, sugar, rum and salt. Cargoes of the last named article seem to have been anticipated by the farmers, far and near, for they would appear upon the scene in their wagons by hundreds when a cargo of salt was ready for delivery, to take their supply directly from the vessel. The salt was passed up from the hold of the vessel in half bushel measures by a line of men continuing to the carts and wagons on the wharf. The large negro, first in line, receiving the measures from the hold, was selected for his stentorian voice. If the scene were repeated today, one of his expressions would have quite a familiar sound. It was his duty to call off the measures as they were handed him for scoring by the tallyman. Commencing with *one-a-ma-new,* his next call was *mark twain,* and when he reached *ny-good-long-tally,* he could easily be heard from the great bridge to the white house. And this monotonous shouting was kept up day after day till the cargo was discharged. By the white house I do not mean the President's residence at Washington, but a famous old farm house of this color which stood out solitary and alone where is now the south end of Colt's dyke. By the great bridge[28] I mean what was then sometimes called the Bridge of Size—our present free bridge—to distinguish it from the Little bridge, so called, which was superseded by the Stone Arch,[29] on Main Street.

The arrival and departure of the New York steamboats, the "Oliver Ellsworth" and "Macdonough," were notable daily events, and attracted

[28] Wooden bridge across the Connecticut River, which burned May 17, 1895 and was replaced by the present stone Bulkeley Bridge.

[29] Still standing and in use on Main Street. Once it was over the Little or Park River, but it now spans the Whitehead Highway.

crowds of people, and when, about 1830, Cornelius Vanderbilt put on a line of opposition boats, and the regular fare was cut down from $5 to $1, the docks were scenes of excitement such as were never known before. Each line employed runners, whose sole qualifications were impudence and brazen lungs, to solicit passengers, and as there were then no hacks, and people intending to take the boats approached the wharves on foot, they were set upon by these fellows, and it required remarkable courage and nerve for a man to choose which boat he would take. At times terms were of no consequence—even "nothing and found" being not an unusual price for a man to pay for his trip to New York. And then when the boats had departed, the runners would pull together their torn clothing, and smooth out their battered hats, and repair other damages received by them from each other or from the canes and fists of the incensed passengers they had assailed. Even, quiet, sober old Hartford could laugh over scenes like these sometimes for weeks together and until the owners of the boats were forced to a settlement of their differences.

*(To be continued.)*

## NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

The Connecticut River Bridge Commission, which recently passed out of existence, has presented the toll sign, 47 x 55 inches, for the Toll Bridge of Hartford which was built in 1818 and was made free, September 11, 1889. This bridge burned May 17, 1895 and was replaced with the present Bulkeley Bridge. The following were the tolls:

| FARES OF THE BRIDGE | Cts. |
|---|---|
| Each man and horse | 4 |
| " foot passenger | 1 |
| " horse or mule led or driven | 3 |
| " ox or other neat kine led or driven | 2 |
| " sheep, swine or goat | 1 |
| " chaise, chair, sulky or gig | 8 |
| " cart or wagon drawn by one horse | 6¼ |
| " one horse barouche | 8 |
| " curricle with two horses & driver with or without passengers | 25 |
| " four wheel pleasure carriage with two horses & driver with or without passengers | 25 |
| " four wheel carriage with four or more horses | 25 |
| " mail stage and driver with or without passengers | 25 |
| " two horse pleasure sleigh & driver with or without passengers | 16 |
| " one horse pleasure sleigh & driver with or without passengers | 8 |
| " sled, sleigh, cart or wagon drawn by two beasts loaded or empty & driver | 12½ |
| " extra beast | 3 |

*The Price of these Bulletins is ten cents each.*